



Washington State Senate

1998 Session Report

8TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT UPDATE FROM SENATOR PAT HALE



Senator Pat Hale

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Dear Friend:

I am happy to report that the 1998 Legislative session ended on time and with a number of significant accomplishments. Among them: a plan to finance critical transportation projects **without** raising the gas tax, tough new laws to deal with drunk drivers, an important new law to protect domestic violence victims from insurance discrimination, property tax relief for senior citizens, and a state spending plan that is well below the voter-imposed spending limit.

If you have any questions about the issues in this newsletter, or other issues related to state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. I appreciate hearing from you and I am honored to serve you in the State Senate.

You can get a message to me by calling the toll free legislative hotline at 1-800-562-6000. You can also call my office directly at 360-786-7614. My Legislative Assistant, Laura Bell, will be happy to help you or get a message to me.

If you have access to the Internet, you can email me at hale_pa@leg.wa.gov and you can visit the Senate Republican Home Page at <http://www.leg.wa.gov/www/senate/src/srhome.htm>.

I want to thank all of you who contacted me during the legislative session. Your ideas and opinions about legislation help me to better represent our community.

Sincerely,

PAT HALE
State Senator

Here's the team that supported you so well during the 1998 session: Laura Bell, Legislative Assistant, and Chris Dodd, Session Aide. Most of you have had an opportunity to work with Laura and realize how fortunate our district is to have such a competent and caring representative in our office.





Helping seniors stay in their homes

One of the hardest taxes for senior citizens to keep up with is the property tax. Many seniors live in homes they bought when their children were small, but the value has so increased in the last 30 or more years, that the property taxes are now beyond their means. Fortunately, senior citizen property tax exemptions from special levies was approved some years ago. This year, I sponsored a measure to increase the allowable income level for senior citizens and disabled retirees to qualify for a property tax break.

Currently the allowable annual income is \$28,000. The new level will be \$30,000. The allowable income for such persons to qualify for a partial exemption from regular levies has also been increased. These new levels of allowable income will apply to

taxes payable in 1999 and thereafter.

The new law also allows seniors and disabled retirees to deduct the cost of health care insurance premiums and to exclude veterans benefits for service connected disabilities before figuring their annual household income. Unfortunately, these new deductions before figuring allowable income were vetoed by the governor.

Property tax exemptions for senior citizens and disabled retirees enable more people to stay in their homes and maintain their personal freedom and control over their own lives.

Protecting domestic violence victims

About a year ago, a woman who was abused by her husband, was further victimized when he made good on his promise that she would not get the family home in the divorce settlement. He burned the house to the ground. But

because her estranged husband was still listed as a co-insured on the homeowner's policy, the woman's insurance claim was denied because his actions were deliberate.

This story does have a happy ending. After winning in court, the insurance company voluntarily paid off the woman's mortgage and even gave her money towards a new home.

The other part of this happy ending is that I was able to get major insurance companies to sit down at the table with me to draft a bill to protect such victims of domestic violence.

Washington now has a law that says domestic violence victims cannot be denied insurance coverage, have their insurance policies canceled, or have an insurance claim denied because of a deliberate and criminal act by their abusive partner or household member.

Making our streets safer

People who get behind the wheel of their cars after drinking or using drugs are a tragedy in the making — for themselves, their families and for innocent strangers.

The Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (MADD) billboards that have gone up across our state with pictures of children who have been killed by drunk drivers strikes at the heart of this issue. This is why I am so very glad we were able this year to pass new, tough laws to deal with DUI (driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol) cases.

The number one goal of our state MADD chapter and the national MADD organization this year was to lower the blood alcohol level at which a person is considered legally drunk. We did this. We lowered that level from .10 to .08. This will result in more prosecutions of people with a blood alcohol level of .10 or more (the higher the level, the more dangerous the driver) because they won't be at the questionable threshold and plea bargaining down to reckless driving will be reduced. People who drink and drive may need help, but a conviction for reckless driving rather than a DUI, will not get the attention of anyone who can help.

We also increased fines and jail time for repeat offenders; we limited "deferred prosecution" — counseling instead of jail time — to once in a lifetime; we provided for a 90-day administrative license revocation for first-time DUI offenders; and we authorized the courts to impose the use of an ignition interlock device, at the car owner's expense, to prevent a drunk person from starting his or her car. The toughest measure we passed permanently revokes the driver's license of a person with three DUI convictions in a seven year period.



Respecting the citizens' spending limit

In 1993, you and your neighbors voted to limit how much your state government can spend. This limit is very reasonable and is tied to the state's population growth and the rate of inflation. Last year, my colleagues and I adopted a two-year budget that was \$67 million below the spending limit. The supplemental budget we crafted this year, keeps us at the same level of spending, and maintains \$778 million in reserves in case of an economic downturn.

Last year we cut everyone's property taxes with Referendum 47, a measure which I supported and you approved. This year, the general fund surplus enabled us to cut taxes in ways that will benefit families by encouraging the development of new jobs. When we are fairer to Washington's businesses and industries, they reward us by hiring more people. A regular paycheck gives people self-esteem and provides security for a family.

The Successful Readers Act

The budget also provides \$17 million for a new grant program to improve a child's reading ability at an early age. As we parents know, the foundation of a good reader is laid before the 3rd grade. These grants will be used to train kindergarten through second grade teachers on how to teach reading more effectively. It will also train elementary school teachers in the use of volunteer tutors and mentors for reading and summer school.

Vocational Education

Many young people excel in vocational education classes and leave high school ready to enter the workforce and become contributing citizens. Unfortunately, the state funding formula we adopted last year wasn't working for many school districts. So, this year in the supplemental budget, we changed things. Now it will be possible for all school districts to better use state dollars in their vocational education programs.

Paying for better roads without raising the gas tax

If lawmakers vow to work harder and think smarter, we can do a better job with the taxpayers' money we already have. This is the approach I took with many of my colleagues on the issue of funding critical transportation projects across our state. We had an \$800 million surplus building up in the state general fund going

into the 1998 session. It just ran counter to all common sense to consider an increase in the gas tax to improve our roads.

The plan we adopted, HB 2894, uses money we already collect from the license tab tax to finance a 6-year road construction plan. The plan also cuts the license tab tax by \$30 per vehicle, and ends the practice of charging new car owners the same rate for two years. Everybody knows that as soon as a person drives his or her new car off the dealer's lot, the value drops. It was wrong for the state to charge people the new car tax rate for two years.

HB 2894 also provides more money for local criminal justice. Benton County will receive \$219,400; Benton City \$17,000; Kennewick \$44,100; Richland \$113,900; and West Richland \$73,500.

This proposal has a referendum clause and will be on the November ballot as Referendum No. 49.

World War II Memorial

A fund raising effort is underway for a memorial on the state capitol grounds to honor Washington's World War II veterans with special acknowledgement to those who gave their lives. The cost is \$700,000. About \$300,000 remains to be raised. A donation of \$75.00 will purchase a 4" x 8" engraved granite tile which will become part of the walkway leading up to the memorial. There is room for up to 20 characters per line, three lines total. For more information call 1-800-562-2308.



Model of World War II Memorial



Providing shelter for seasonal farm workers

The standard building codes we have in our state are designed to protect all of us. In the case of seasonal farm workers, however, the codes kept farmers from providing temporary, but adequate housing for their seasonal workers. More than half of these workers went without adequate housing last year during the harvests. Some slept on the river banks, others out in open fields, and still others lived in cars. It is a deplorable situation. This is why I co-sponsored a bill this year to create a new temporary worker housing code. Last year, the governor vetoed such a measure, but this year he agreed to support our efforts. Now farmers will be able to provide decent on-site shelter for seasonal workers.



Senator Hale looks on as Governor Locke signs into law her bill to increase legislative oversight of agency rule making. Sen. Hale chairs the legislative committee that keeps a watchful eye on government rules and regulations to ensure they are practical and do what the Legislature intended. Since the Tri-Cities is one of the most heavily regulated areas in the world, this committee is especially important to us.

Helping our Hospice House help those in need

This is the story of “government red tape” at its worse. Our Hospice House wanted to increase the number of people it could serve. But the process for doing so is arduous and complicated, **and in this case very unnecessary.**

Efforts to work this out with the agency were not moving, so Senator Loveland and I added language to the supplemental budget bill that exempts our Hospice House from a mile of unnecessary paperwork. Now, our Hospice House can expand to better serve those in need.